

Edited by Thomas F. Best

Baptism Today

Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications

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Contents

Introduction

Thomas F. Best vii

Part I: Commentaries

Chapter 1: Baptism: Sacrament of the Kingdom

Boris Bobrinskoy (Eastern Orthodox) 3

Chapter 2: The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

in the Armenian Apostolic Church

Mesrob Tashjian (Oriental Orthodox) 15

Chapter 3: The Baptismal Liturgy

of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

Jacob Kurien (Oriental Orthodox) 23

Chapter 4: Rite[s] of Baptism in the Catholic Church:

A Theological-Pastoral Commentary

James F. Puglisi, SA (Catholic) 29

Chapter 5: The Rite of Holy Baptism in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*

Jeffrey A. Truscott (Lutheran) 45

Chapter 6: Baptism in the Anglican Communion

Paul F. Bradshaw (Anglican) 55

Chapter 7: Baptism in the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition

Martha Moore-Keish (Presbyterian) 63

Chapter 8: The Baptism of Believers

Paul Fiddes (Baptist) 73

Chapter 9: Baptism and the Quaker Tradition

Janet Scott (Quaker) 81

Chapter 10: Baptismal Practice among North American Mennonites

Rebecca Slough (Mennonite) 89

Chapter 11: The Initiatory Rites of the United Methodist Church

Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Methodist) 99

Chapter 12: Baptismal Understanding and Practice
in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Keith Watkins (Christian Church [Disciples of Christ]) 109

Chapter 13: The Baptismal Liturgy
of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar
George Mathew (Mar Thoma) 115

Chapter 14: Baptism in the Uniting Church in Australia:
The Liturgy, with Commentary and Reflections
Robert Gribben (United) 133

Chapter 15: Witness in the Waters:
Baptism and Pentecostal Spirituality
Daniel Albrecht (Pentecostal) 147

Chapter 16: Christian Baptism: A Seventh-day Adventist Appraisal
Bert Beach and George Reid (Seventh-day Adventist) 169

Chapter 17: A Salvation Army Perspective on Baptism:
Theological Understanding and Liturgical Practice
Earl Robinson (Salvation Army) 173

Chapter 18: Water Baptism in African Independent Churches:
The Paradigm of Christ Holy Church International
Thomas Odoro (African Instituted Churches) 181

Part II: Survey Articles

Chapter 1: Toward Mutual Recognition of Baptism
Paul Meyendorff (Eastern Orthodox) 195

Chapter 2: Unity in Diversity:
Convergence in the Churches' Baptismal Practices
James F. Puglisi, SA (Catholic) 207

Chapter 3: Convergence and Divergence: Baptism Today
Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Methodist) 213

Part III: Signs of Recognition

Chapter 1: Mutual Recognition of Baptism Agreement: Germany
Introduction
Thomas F. Best 227
Christian Baptism 228

Chapter 2: Common Baptismal Certificate: Australia

Australia's Common Baptismal Certificate:
Its History and Significance
Robert Gribben 231

Certificate of Baptism 233

Chapter 3: "Baptismal Practice in an Ecumenical Context" Document: Massachusetts, USA

The Genesis of an Ecumenical Text
Gordon White 235

Baptism: Baptismal Practice in an Ecumenical Context 236

Part IV: Special Issues

Chapter 1: Baptism in a Post-“State Church” Situation: The Case of the Church of Sweden *Bo Larsson* (Lutheran) 247

Chapter 2: Interrogating Christian Practices: Popular Religiosity across the Ocean *J. Jayakiran Sebastian* (United) 255

Part V: Baptismal Services

Chapter 1: Rite of Christian Initiation (Eastern Orthodox) 269

Chapter 2: The Canon of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism (Oriental Orthodox) 289

Chapter 3: Text of the Mystery of Holy Baptism (Oriental Orthodox) 303

Chapter 4: Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and Rite of Baptism for Several Children (Catholic) 319

Chapter 5: Holy Baptism (Lutheran) 359

Chapter 6: The Baptism of Children (Lutheran) 365

Chapter 7: An Anglican Service of Baptism and Confirmation (Anglican) 371

Chapter 8: The Sacrament of Baptism (Presbyterian) 381

Chapter 9: The Baptism of Believers (Baptist)	393
Chapter 10: The Rite of Baptism (Mennonite)	401
Chapter 11: The Baptismal Covenant I (Methodist)	409
Chapter 12: A Representative Disciples Rite of Christian Baptism (Christian Church [Disciples of Christ])	417
Chapter 13: Order of Holy Baptism and Chrismation (Mar Thoma)	423
List of Contributors	433
Acknowledgments	437
Index	441

Introduction

Thomas F. Best

BAPTISM TODAY:

SHOWING FORTH OUR UNITY IN CHRIST

We belong to Christ: we are his and no other's. This fact is the foundation of our identity as persons, and our unity as Christians, experienced and expressed first in our baptism in Christ and into Christ's body, the Church. In our baptism Christ has claimed each of us for his own, and thus made all of us one in him. The unity we share in Christ is greater than all the differences—historical, theological, cultural—which divide Christians and the churches today: unity is our birth-right, shown forth brightly in our common baptism.

It is thus no surprise that baptism is foundational for the modern ecumenical movement. To give two examples: many Protestant churches have long understood that their common baptism reflects a unity which is more fundamental than their differences in the understanding and practice of the rite itself.¹ And it was the statement on baptism from the Second Vatican Council² that, perhaps more than any other text, signaled the entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement.

In the multilateral and conciliar contexts, the section on baptism was the most positively received part of the Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM);³ and a common affirmation of baptism is central to the ecclesiology text “Called to be the One Church” adopted by the member churches of the World Council of Churches at its Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006.⁴ The bilateral discussions have, for the most part, not focused on baptism precisely because in most cases it does not pose an obstacle to mutual recognition among the churches concerned.⁵ The situation with regard to baptism today is best captured in the text “Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: A JWG Study,” produced recently by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.⁶ Meanwhile the Faith and Order text-in-process “One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition” is

pressing the discussion forward, stressing the relation of baptism to the process of the believer's lifelong growth into Christ, and exploring the relation of the faith of the believer to the faith of the Christian community as a whole.⁷

Where churches are able to recognize one another's baptisms, variations in practice and understanding are seen as reflecting common, underlying convictions about the life of faith and how one enters into it. Yet in other cases, divergent practices and positions reveal fundamental fault lines in the understanding of the faith. For example, differences over the relation of the believer's faith to that of the Church, and the relation of particular churches to the one Church, lead to some churches rebaptizing (or, in their understanding, baptizing) persons already baptized in another church.⁸

To take another area of concern: baptism with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has emerged, on both biblical and traditional grounds, as the norm for churches within the ecumenical movement. Yet there are ecumenically engaged churches that, on certain biblical grounds, baptize in the name of Jesus only, and others that baptize without water. Some churches with a distinguished history of Christian witness effect entry into the Christian community without baptismal rites. Questions arise on different grounds as some churches, seeking to inculcate baptism so that its meaning may be evident in their cultural context, substitute other substances for water or use language other than the traditional Trinitarian formula.

Other expressions of nonrecognition—or simply the failure to put into practice the recognition which already exists—also distort and obscure the unity that is already ours in Christ. And this occurs not only between confessional families but between churches within the same confessional family. For all these reasons, then, many churches are divided not only at the Lord's Table but also at the baptistery and at the font. This is intolerable, not least because it denies Christ's will for our unity and his initiative in making us one in him.

Beyond the ecumenical imperative for unity, work on baptism is important for a host of liturgical and theological reasons. The practice and understanding of baptism is intimately related to a church's apprehension of central elements of the Christian faith, including the meaning of salvation and how it is received and experienced; the relation of the individual to the Christian community, both locally and universally; the relation of the faith of the individual to the faith of the Church; the role of liturgy in the life of the individual and of the

Christian community; the importance of Christian nurture, for both the believer and the community as a whole; and the understanding of sacrament and the relation of the Christian and the Church to creation. Lack of clarity about the meaning and practice of baptism has implications for all these areas of the faith and life of each church.

Just as acutely, baptism stands today at the center of a host of complex and sensitive pastoral questions: How may I, baptized as an infant and now an adult, have the actual “experience” of that baptismal event? Should I, as a parent, bring my infant children for baptism—or wait, so that they can make their own decision in the matter? Should my church admit non-baptized children to the Lord’s Table? What is the role of sponsors or godparents in the baptismal rite, and afterward, and what relation must they have to the church? What is the role of baptism in relation to cultural identity, especially in situations of secularization and religious pluralism? These are questions that are on the agenda of many churches today, and that sometimes divide churches, not only from one another but also within themselves. For all these reasons a host of issues related to baptism call for study and clarification by the churches, both individually and ecumenically.

BAPTISM TODAY:

THE INTENTION AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Mindful of all these factors, *Baptism Today* offers a survey of the understanding and practice of baptism in a wide range of Christian churches and contexts today. The collection is guided by the conviction that the *understanding* and the *practice* of baptism are inseparable, that the rite itself and its meaning for both the believer and the Christian community can be understood only when the two are held together: the theology of baptism does not exist apart from its liturgical expression, and the liturgy shows forth the faith of the church.

My aims in gathering this material are several: 1) to provide information, presented by persons from the church or tradition concerned, on baptism as perceived and performed across the spectrum of Christian churches and contexts today; 2) to offer, wherever practicable, not only each church’s account of baptism but also the (or a) baptismal liturgy in use in that church today; 3) to strengthen awareness of baptism as the foundation of our unity within the one body of Christ; 4) to encourage reflection on the relation between the various theological understandings of baptism, and the actual baptismal practices of the churches today; 5) to promote understanding among Christians

of their own baptismal life, and that of other churches, as a contribution to the greater mutual recognition of baptism among the churches today; 6) to contribute to overcoming divisive differences in the baptismal understanding and practice of the churches today; and 7) thereby to promote the renewal of the churches in their common confession, worship, witness, and service today.

The book is organized in the following way. Section I, *Commentaries*, includes articles on baptism as understood and practiced today. These move from the ancient foundations, both East and West, through the churches of the Reformation and the Anglican tradition, through the historic free churches, to those founded in the nineteenth century and later, and embracing the spectrum from Eastern Orthodox to African Instituted Churches, not forgetting Quakers and Pentecostals on the way. The collection embraces not only the classic ecumenically engaged churches but also voices not so often heard in the ecumenical discussion.

Section II, *Survey Articles*, offers reflections on the collection as a whole by three seasoned liturgists representing Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant perspectives. The authors were asked to address, in the way they thought best, three broad areas of concern: 1) to identify lines of convergence—and continuing divergence—among the churches in respect to baptism today; 2) to suggest how churches might build on the mutual recognition of baptism (so far as it exists) to strengthen their common confession, worship, witness, and service; and 3) to suggest concrete steps which might help the churches overcome the remaining divisive differences in their perception and performance of baptism today. Thus the aim is not detailed analysis of the various commentaries and liturgical texts, but rather a review and analysis of the overall situation today with respect to baptism.

Section III, *Signs of Recognition*, presents three practical examples (each preceded by an introduction indicating its ecumenical and cultural context) of how churches are making visible their baptismal unity in Christ. The most recent, from Germany in 2007, is an official declaration by eleven churches at the national level of the mutual recognition of baptism. The second, from Australia in 1983, is a certificate of baptism which is recognized at the national level by ten churches. The third, from Massachusetts, USA, in 2000, identifies “points of baptismal practice” that can be affirmed by a wide range of churches. This text was agreed to at the state level by the member churches of the Massachusetts Commission on Christian Unity (now part of the

Massachusetts Council of Churches). Significantly, each text stresses the centrality of the use of water and the Trinitarian formula (the Massachusetts text allows for the possibility of other language being used in addition to—but not instead of—the traditional formula). Each text makes plain, in its own way, the fact that baptism is into the one body of Christ—and not into a particular part of it.

Section IV, Special Issues, explores the complex variety of challenges facing the churches in their baptismal practice and understanding in several very different cultural and religious contexts today. Authors from Sweden and India explore issues such as the relation of baptism and church membership to cultural identity and the meaning of baptism in an age marked by both radical secularization and lively religious pluralism.

Section V, Baptismal Services, concludes the book with a collection of services in use today in a wide variety of churches around the world. These have been supplied by the authors of the respective commentaries or other articles, to which they form an indispensable complement. (The sources of these services, as of the “Signs of Recognition” mentioned above, may be found in the acknowledgments at the end of this book.) Through these services one can enter more completely into the actual baptismal practice—and the baptismal understanding embodied in the practice—of the churches and confessions here represented. Not every author supplied a corresponding baptismal service, either because the church concerned does not have a set form of words for the service, or because the author felt that his or her commentary made the practice sufficiently clear. In the case of the Uniting Church in Australia, the author has incorporated the baptismal service into the commentary.

BEYOND BAPTISM TODAY . . .

In conclusion, it is important to stress that baptism has implications for many aspects of the life of the churches, and for the ecumenical movement, particularly in relation to the eucharist. Because baptism is the basis of our unity within the one body of Christ, baptism points beyond itself:⁹ it yearns to be completed in the full eucharistic fellowship of all the members of Christ’s body. Indeed, in discussions of baptism among laypersons, the most commonly asked question is: If we *do* have a common baptism, then why not a common eucharist? Thus the mutual recognition of baptism, and all work on baptism, calls the churches to renewed efforts toward full ecclesial communion, in order that the unity which is theirs in Christ through the waters of the one baptism may find its fulfillment at his one table.

Finally, it is my pleasure to thank each of the contributors to this volume for their engagement and their patience in seeing the project through to its conclusion. I would like to thank in particular Alexander Freeman for his work in preparing the manuscript for publication, as well as Katherine Pastukhova for her efforts in collecting the material, and Carolyn McComish for her work in the earlier stages of the process. Thanks are due also to the publications staff of the World Council of Churches and to the staff at Liturgical Press for their commitment to the project as well as to Brian Flanagan for his work in preparing the index. I offer thanks also to James Puglisi, SA, for his encouragement in this and many other matters over the years.

Notes

¹ See, for example, (embodying a long tradition): “1972: The Pullach Report” [Anglican–Lutheran], in *Growth in Agreement I: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1972–1982*, eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Visher, Faith and Order paper No. 108 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, second printing, 2007), pars. 64–66, 22.

² “Baptism, therefore, establishes a sacramental bond of unity among all who through it are reborn”: *Unitatis Redintegratio*, par. 22.

³ Faith and Order Paper No. 111, 25th anniversary printing with added intro. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982; 2007), 1–7. For the churches’ official responses to BEM see Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text*, Vols. I–VI, Faith and Order Papers Nos. 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986–1988); and for Faith and Order’s analysis of these responses see *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry 1982–1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order Paper No. 149 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

⁴ See Luis N. Rivera-Pagán, ed., *God, in Your Grace . . . : Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007), pars. 8–9 and 14(c), 258 and 260. See also the current Faith and Order ecclesiology study document *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, Faith and Order Paper No. 198 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), pars. 74–77, 44–46.

⁵ See the surveys of the treatment of baptism in the bilateral dialogues by André Birmelé, “Baptism in Ecumenical Dialogues,” in *Dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) on the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism*, eds. Wilhelm Hüffmeier and Tony Peck, Leuenberg Documents 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto

Lembeck, 2005), 79–103, citation 79; and the previous version, “Baptism and the Unity of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogues,” in *Baptism & the Unity of the Church*, eds. Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (Grand Rapids, MI, and Geneva: Wm. B. Eerdmans and WCC Publications, 1998), 104–29.

⁶ See *Eighth Report: Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, Geneva-Rome, 2005* (WCC Publications: 2005), Appendix C, 45–72.

⁷ This text-in-progress, which is not yet an official text of the Faith and Order Commission, is available in *Minutes of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order, 12–19 June 2007, Crans-Montana, Switzerland*, Faith and Order Paper No. 206 (Geneva: Faith and Order, 2007), Appendix V, 57–81, or directly from Faith and Order, WCC, 150, Rte. de Ferney, 1211 Geneva, Switzerland. This text is especially sensitive to the liturgical dimensions of the rite of baptism. Some results from this study have already been incorporated in the Joint Working Group text; see, for example, “Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism: A JWG Study,” pars. 52, 57.

⁸ The recent Anglican–Baptist bilateral dialogue has tackled this and related issues directly; see “Conversations around the World: Report of the International Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance,” in *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005*, eds. Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs, SA, Faith and Order Paper No. 204 (Geneva: WCC Publications and Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), pars. 40–52, 342–347.

⁹ This paragraph incorporates material from the Faith and Order text-in-progress, “One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition,” par. 109, 81.

Part I

Commentaries

Chapter 1

Baptism: Sacrament of the Kingdom

Boris Bobrinskoy

INTRODUCTION

The very title of this essay indicates my concern to pay homage to the person of Father Alexander Schmemann on the twentieth anniversary of his death—twenty years during which the seed sown in the earth is not dead but has born abundant fruit. Father Alexander was, and remains, a witness to the kingdom of God. He was such throughout his entire life and in all of his work, from his youth through his death and well beyond the limits of his earthly life.

To Father Schmemann's mind, the kingdom of God is manifested and inaugurated in the Church. The Church is the very epiphany of the kingdom, as he so liked to say, and it is such at every moment of its existence, through its various sacramental, hierarchical, liturgical, pastoral, and doctrinal structures. He believed firmly that the Church both proclaims and reveals the kingdom of God despite the deficiencies of its members and of the ecclesial institution itself. Nevertheless, Father Alexander rejected every form of confessional or ecclesiastical triumphalism. He never hesitated to characterize Orthodoxy as being in a state of crisis with regard to the exercise of conciliarity and collegiality, as well as with regard to eucharistic understanding and practice and the general way in which the sacraments are celebrated.

This brings us to our subject of baptism as sacrament of the kingdom. First of all, I would like to offer several quotations from Father Alexander's study on baptism titled *Of Water and the Spirit*. The introductory chapter of this work invites the reader "To Rediscover Baptism." This title is significant in that it reveals Father Alexander's acute awareness of the fact that there is a veritable "absence" of baptism in our lives: "[T]o put it very simply," he asserts:

Baptism is *absent* from our life. It is, to be sure, still accepted by all as a self-evident necessity. It is not opposed, not even questioned. It is

performed all the time in our churches. It is, in other terms, “taken for granted.” Yet, in spite of all this, I dare to affirm that in a very real sense it is absent, and this “absence” is at the root of many tragedies of the Church today.¹

Father Alexander continues by showing that baptism is absent from the ecclesial liturgy of the community as a whole, in that it “has become a private family celebration performed as a rule outside the corporate worship of the Church, precisely outside its *leitourgia*.” “Is it not true,” he asks, “that one can be a regular church-goer for years and years without having attended one Baptism, without even knowing how it is performed?”

Yet he goes still further in his critique:

Being thus absent from liturgy, Baptism then is naturally absent from our piety. . . . [T]oday’s Christian does not relate either himself or the Church to Baptism. He knows, of course, that he was baptized and that Baptism is a necessary condition for his membership in the Church. But this knowledge remains abstract. It is not referred to the Church as the very community of those who died with Christ and who therefore were given a new life in Him. . . . Finally, having ceased to feed Christian piety, Baptism obviously has lost its power to shape our Christian worldview. . . . A Christian of the past knew not only intellectually but with his entire being that through Baptism he was placed into a radically new relationship with all aspects of life and with the “world” itself; that he received, along with his faith, a radically new understanding of life. Baptism for him was the starting point and also the foundation of a Christian “philosophy of life,” of a permanent sense of direction guiding him firmly throughout his entire existence, supplying answers to all questions, solving all problems.

“This foundation,” he adds, “is still here with us. Baptism is performed. But it has ceased to be comprehended as the door leading into a new life and as the power to fight for this new life’s preservation and growth in us.” These passages are exceptionally important, even decisive, in leading toward an authentic “rediscovery” of Christian baptism as participation in the paschal mystery, which is the essence of life within the Church.

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES IN REGARD TO BAPTISM

I would like to take these words of Father Alexander as a point of departure for the remarks I want to make here. Rather than limit my-

self to purely practical considerations, I would like as well to recall several fundamental theological principles concerning the Trinitarian and ecclesiastical nature of all sacramental life, particularly in regard to baptism.

Basing its reflection on the insights of Father Georges Florovsky, modern Orthodox theology stresses just how much the Church is torn between the two fundamental dimensions of its life, both of which are eschatological. On the one hand, the Church is *in statu viae*, that is, engaged in a continual pilgrimage toward the kingdom of God. On the other hand, it is *in statu patriae*, that is, the Church both inaugurates and manifests in the here and now the Trinitarian kingdom to come. The tension between these two states of the Church's being is fruitful. But that fruitfulness is purchased at the price of a great deal of suffering, because throughout its history the Church is weighed down by the limitations and deficiencies of its members, to the detriment of its witness within the world.

As a "sacrament of the kingdom" the Church is, above all, the locus of Trinitarian communion, revealed and communicated within the divine economy. We owe it especially to St. Basil of Caesarea, following St. Irenaeus, to have shown the importance of the idea of *koinonia* regarding both the inner life of the Godhead and God's presence and activity in the world. On the one hand, *koinonia* expresses the full unity of nature and honor that the Spirit shares with the Father and the Son in the domain of inner-Trinitarian life itself, what is frequently referred to as the "immanent Trinity" or Trinity *ad intra*. On the other hand, *koinonia* refers to the life of human persons renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the sacramental life of the Church. Thus the "communion of the Holy Spirit" stands as a central theme of St. Basil's pneumatology of salvation in the specific sense of the *gift* of the Spirit. As Basil declares, "The Holy Spirit shares with the Father and the Son the communion [*koinonia*] of nature and communion in all things, a union which is unbreakable, proper [to divine life], natural and inseparable."²

In the divine economy by which the faithful become sanctified, this same Spirit, Basil says, "renders [us] spiritual through communion with Himself, reintroduces us into Paradise, leads us to the kingdom of heaven and to adoption as children of God, grants us the confidence to address God as 'Father,' to share [*koinonein*] in the grace of Christ, to be called a child of light, and to have a share in eternal glory."³

It is significant that the same term, "communion," can express both the ineffable mystery of the unity of the Trinitarian hypostases and

indicate as well the pathway of divine condescension toward the human creature who is called to participate in divine life. St. Basil reminds us that this Trinitarian communion is above all a gift of the Spirit, in whom and by whom we unite ourselves to Christ—Christ through whom we receive the gift of divine sonship. “Under the influence of the illuminating power of the Spirit,” Basil affirms, “we set our eyes on the beauty of the divine Image of the invisible God (that is, the Son of God), and thereby we are raised to the radiant vision of the Archetype (God the Father).”⁴

ECCLESIAL AND EUCHARISTIC COMMUNION

It is important, in this regard, to note the multiple and entirely complementary dimensions of ecclesial and eucharistic communion.

1. Communion in the Body of Christ.

Underlying this theme is the Pauline theology of the Church as Body of Christ, the Church of which we are members and Christ is the Head. The entire economy of salvation is included in this theme. In the eucharistic celebration, the Church “remembers” and thereby renders present the entire work of salvation until the glorious Second Coming of Christ.

2. Communion in the Holy Spirit

The same Spirit who from all eternity proceeds from the Father and rests upon the Son is sent by the Father and the Son to rest (*menein*) upon the Body of Christ, of which we are the members, in order to confer upon us filial adoption and to lead us to “theosis” or deification.

3. Communion in Christ in a Relation at Once Fraternal and Nuptial

That is, Christ introduces us into a personal relationship with himself. “Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking” (Rev 3:20). The intimacy of that relation is such that the apostle does not hesitate to affirm, “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

4. Ecclesial Communion within the Unity that Marks Every Dimension of the Church’s Life

Ecclesial communion belongs within the unity of the Church’s life, particularly of the Church celestial or triumphant. The expression “real presence” of Christ is very often understood in a way that is too

limited, focusing on a “personal” Christ. This notion needs to be extended as well to the entire ecclesial body. For within the eucharistic mystery the entire assembly of the saints is present.

5. Communion in the Entire Ecclesial Assembly

Here we touch upon the very heart of our subject. We shall see that baptismal initiation introduces us into every aspect of ecclesial communion, including the conscience of the Church and its faith, which we confess from liturgy to liturgy.

6. Ecclesial Communion Both Open and Closed

Our communion in the Church is, on the one hand, “closed,” reserved to those who have been initiated into the faith. On the other hand, it is open insofar as it constitutes the “sacrament of the brother” (according to the expression of St. John Chrysostom). This latter aspect includes compassion for the poor beyond every boundary, since the redeeming sacrifice of Christ rendered present through every eucharistic celebration is offered “for the life of the world” (John 6:51).

BAPTISM, NEW LIFE IN CHRIST, AND THE CHURCH

Fundamental to our faith is the fact that our life in and through Christ—our existence within the life of the Holy Trinity—is an actual incorporation into Christ’s death and resurrection. The entire sacramental and liturgical life of the Church enables us to participate in his redemptive Pascha. This is a possibility offered to us from our birth until our death, that is, until our ultimate Pascha. The various stages of our human life are assumed under the direction of the Church by means of the sacraments, by which the light of the kingdom penetrates into the sphere of our human, earthly existence.

At this point I would like to underscore the centrality of the mysteries of baptismal initiation, chrismation, and Eucharist. Together, these three constitute a unique and permanent foundation of new birth in the Spirit. Yet the three are also permanent elements of the entire Christian life. (I shall come back to the importance of the permanent, essential link that unites these three sacramental acts.)

Trinitarian faith introduces the catechumen into the ecclesial community. It creates, renews, and perpetuates the Church, since the Trinity reveals itself precisely in and through the Church. Conversely, it is in the Trinity that the Church finds its source and ground, that it lives, moves, and has its being (cf. Acts 17:28). Orthodox theology is highly

sensitive to the “Trinitarian ontology” of the Church: the fact that the Church lives in the image of the Trinity, and that the same love which reveals the ineffable and eternal being of God constitutes the ultimate mystery of the Church. The Eucharist thus represents the advent of the kingdom of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into which we have access through Trinitarian baptism. But the Eucharist also represents the locus where the Church reveals and renews itself. Baptism, then, is both the gift of new life in the Spirit, the source of Trinitarian grace, and the entryway into the Church, where the sacrament of initiation is fulfilled.⁵

Allow me for a moment to focus more specifically on the permanent dimension of baptism in the whole of Christian life: that of the individual believer but also within the entire ecclesial Body. Some years ago the Reverend Father Camelot, one of the foremost initiators of liturgical renewal in France, devoted an entire work to what he called *The Spirituality of Baptism*.⁶ He very rightly reminded us that “baptism is the symbol and the anticipation of all that should constitute every spiritual life: throughout his spiritual pilgrimage in this life, the Christian is called to do nothing other than to develop and actualize the potential he has been given in baptism, ‘the entryway into spiritual life.’”⁷

With Father Camelot, we can affirm that baptism is truly the “source of every spiritual life.” It is enough to read through the rituals of baptismal initiation to discover in them the basic, permanent structures of “the life in Christ.” These include the repeated renunciation of Satan and all his works; the several affirmations of “belonging to Christ”; the immersion into Christ’s death and rising up in his resurrection; the “putting on” of Christ by vesting with the baptismal garment; the seal of the Spirit through chrismation, which confers on the newly baptized the charism of “royal priesthood”; and finally, the eschatological fruit of baptismal initiation, which is communion in the Holy Eucharist, the sacrament and manifestation of the kingdom of God.

Baptism also inaugurates for the Christian, as for the entire ecclesial community, a time of spiritual warfare. In this struggle against the principalities and powers, the paschal victory in Christ comes not only at the end of our earthly sojourn. It is already given from the very beginning. The Christian is called, therefore, to preserve the purity of the baptismal garment and to renew that purity again and again in the blood of the Lamb.

From the very beginning, baptism has been experienced as an event of the Church, one that concerns and involves the entire eucharistic

community. Both the *Didache* and St. Justin Martyr bear witness to the participation of the Christian assembly in the preparation and unfolding of the baptismal rite. Similarly, the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus of Rome attests to the fact that baptismal initiation finds its fulfillment in eucharistic communion.⁸ Finally, St. John Chrysostom exhorts the newly baptized to concern themselves with every aspect of Church life: “Don’t be satisfied,” he says, “with the fact that you are well yourself, and that you have been liberated from evil. Take care and concern yourself as well with the well-being of those who are members of the same Body as you are, that they too might avoid the ravages of evil. For we are members of one another.”⁹

APECTS OF THE BAPTISMAL RITE

Let us consider now in more detail the essential aspects of the baptismal rite.

1. *The Rejection of Satan*

The struggle and rejection of Satanic seductions is the daily affair of the entire Church. When the celebrant asks the catechumen, “Do you renounce Satan?” he questions not only the catechumen and his or her sponsors. The entire ecclesial community renews its baptismal commitment and reaffirms its willingness to struggle in the name of Christ.

2. *Commitment to Faith: The Creed*

The same thing must be said for the commitment of faithfulness to Christ the Lord, affirmed in the reading of the Nicene Creed, our “symbol of faith.” In this regard, it is necessary to stress that the ecclesiological perspective of the Creed is threefold, a point that has fundamental significance for our theme.

- a. In the first place, the Creed or Confession of Faith is that of *the Church* in its entirety. The catechumen professes that faith and makes it his or her own. This confession is then literally taken up again in the anaphora of the eucharistic liturgy—and it is proclaimed by the entire Church.¹⁰
- b. This confession of faith is also fulfilled *within the Church*, which is the locus, the “sacred space” of the Spirit, in which the newly baptized are reborn to new life and to Trinitarian faith.
- c. Finally, the baptismal confession is a confession of faith *about the Church*: expressed not only in the ecclesiological article dealing

with the Church as such but also in the entire Creed, which affirms that the mystery of the Church is coextensive with the Trinitarian economy of salvation.

3. Signification of Death and Resurrection

Baptismal immersion signifies the very real death of the Old Adam and his resurrection in Christ, the New Adam. In the paschal mystery and in his ascension, Christ recapitulates sinful humanity in its entirety; then he gathers that humanity in his own Body, risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth,” Jesus declares, “will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). This notion brings into play the entire theology of Augustine and Chrysostom concerning *Christus totus*, the “whole Christ,” with all of its ecclesial dimensions worked out so well by Georges Florovsky and his disciple, Metropolitan John Zizioulas.

4. The Marriage of the Church to Christ

The nuptial Covenant of the newly baptized person with the divine Bridegroom, symbolized by the triple procession around the baptismal font, is wholly integrated into the mystery of the spiritual “marriage” of the entire Church to Christ. That mystery is recalled and reactualized by every baptismal celebration.

5. Chrismation, the Seal of the Spirit

The chrismation with Holy Unction—the “seal of the Spirit”—should never be dissociated from baptism: neither in liturgical action nor in theological meaning. From the most ancient times, chrismation always stood as an integral part of the sacrament of baptismal initiation. Chrismation serves as the fulfillment and provides the fullness—the very “confirmation”—of baptism. We should point out that the Syriac tradition of the Church in Antioch, represented especially by St. John Chrysostom, knew of no such “post-baptismal” unction even at the end of the fourth century. Nonetheless, that does not at all diminish the Church’s consciousness of the perfective or fulfilling action of the Holy Spirit. The Syriac tradition underscores all the more the *prior* action of the Spirit, who sanctifies the baptismal waters and renders the candidate capable of renouncing Satanic powers and confessing Christ as Lord.

The Spirit sanctifies the entire pathway of the baptized Christians, from their most secret inner conversion, through their entire conscious

ecclesial commitment, through their death and resurrection “in water and the Spirit,” through their growth in eucharistic communion at the chalice of “fire and the Spirit,” to culminate in the “fruits of the Spirit,” which are a foretaste of the fullness of the kingdom.¹¹

6. The Culmination of Baptism: the Eucharist

Baptism finally culminates in the Eucharist, from which it is theologically inseparable. Perhaps I should have begun these reflections by recalling the principles of eucharistic ecclesiology and the centrality of the Eucharist as a true fulfillment of all ecclesial sacramentality. Then I could have proceeded backwards, as it were, to show that the pathway of Christian initiation leads necessarily to its culmination, its ultimate truth. But conversely, it is necessary to insist with just as much force that the baptismal aspect is inherent in every Eucharist, since baptism is indeed the indispensable, permanent, and unique entryway into the nuptial chamber of the eucharistic banquet.

THE ROLE OF GODPARENTS

It would be appropriate at this point to say a few words about the indispensable and many-faceted role of *godparents*.

1. First of all, the godparents represent the entire eucharistic community, for whom they assume responsibility for the authenticity of the commitment assumed by the one to be baptized.
2. I would add to that the fact that in reality it is the entire ecclesial community who supports the newly baptized and speaks both for and with him or her.
3. Yet the ecclesial community not only supports the newly baptized in his or her struggle to continually renounce Satan and reaffirm faithfulness to Christ as Lord. It also relives and, as a body, reactualizes the baptism of each of its members. The entire body of the faithful present at the baptismal ceremony should lift its voice to reaffirm the commitment of each member to Christ. This is the very meaning of the baptismal confession of faith taken up by the community as a whole during the eucharistic celebration.
4. Finally, when it is a matter of the baptism of children, the godparents’ role is not only to represent the entire Church. It is also to be the spokespersons for those who cannot yet speak, yet who are mysteriously reborn into a newness of life by the power of the Holy Spirit.

BAPTISM AND THE EUCHARIST: AN ISSUE IN LITURGICAL PRACTICE TODAY

Given the present circumstances of Orthodoxy, it is not possible to return directly, insistently, and regularly to the ancient practice of baptism celebrated during the course of the eucharistic liturgy. This is for several reasons:

1. First, because there is an enormous amount of reeducation that must be done, not only of the people of God but also of our pastors themselves regarding the enduring, ecclesial meaning of the baptismal liturgy.
2. Then again, introducing the sacraments of initiation into the framework of the eucharistic liturgy can only occur in those communities that are truly prepared, where there is a profound consciousness of the communal reality of the eucharist. In very large churches it is difficult to develop this consciousness. Moreover, too great a number of baptisms within the Divine Liturgy would seriously compromise the "normal" celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.
3. I am very pleased to see the deep convergence and unity in eucharistic baptismal practice among churches on the American continent as well as in certain parishes in France and England. The schema suggested by Father Alexander at the end of his book on baptismal initiation corresponds directly with the practice in my parish. This practice is spreading like oil on water to influence quite a number of Orthodox communities in the West. I can add that I reported on our practice at the last pastoral assembly of the clergy of our diocese in June 2002, where our bishops were present. In fact, for more than thirty years our bishops have given us their blessing to maintain this practice, which by now has become quite customary.
4. Finally, I can mention a directive of Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow, dated November 18, 1993, in which he encourages the sacramental practice which places the baptismal service in the context of the Eucharist. It should be noted, however, that there are a certain number of differences between their practice and ours concerning the larger integration of baptism and chrismation into the eucharistic liturgy.¹²
5. Father Alexander was insistent that prudence and collegial reflection be exercised in this regard, particularly in relation to our hierarchs. He states:

The only adequate solution consists . . . in reinstating *baptismal liturgies*, i.e., the celebration of Baptism before the Divine Liturgy yet in organic liturgical connection with it. How to achieve this must be the object of careful study, discussion and ultimately approval by the hierarchy, without whose sanction, permission and blessing, nothing ought to be done in the Church. Therefore, [my] suggestions are made tentatively, as a starting point of a much needed liturgical and pastoral discussion.¹³

CONCLUSION

Whatever our efforts to rediscover in liturgical practice the ecclesial meaning of baptism—and of all sacramental life—we can only conclude by recalling again the words of Father Alexander:

Obviously none of these “recoveries”—the theological, the liturgical, the spiritual—can be instantaneous, the fruit of merely external reforms and “adjustments.” We need much patient study, much pastoral concern, and much love. And above all we need a deepening of our Church consciousness, of the very *mind* of the Church, truly a thirst and hunger for “living water.” But I am absolutely convinced that such recovery is not only desirable and possible, but that indeed only in it, only by a common “rediscovery” of the true meaning of Baptism, of its fullness, beauty, power and joy, can we again make our faith “the victory that conquers the world” (1 John 5:4).¹⁴

Notes

¹ The following quotes from Father Alexander’s work are found in: Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit. A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 8–10.

² St. Basil, *Treatise on the Holy Spirit*, 13.30; 24.55; 26.63.

³ Ibid., 9.23; 15.36.

⁴ Ibid., 18.47.

⁵ See B. Bobrinskoy, “Le mystère pascal du baptême” (Paris, 1971), 128–129; reprinted in *Communion du Saint-Esprit* (Abbaye de Belfontaine, coll. “Spiritualité Orientale,” no. 56, 1992): 103–60.

⁶ *La spiritualité du baptême*, 2e éd. (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1993).

⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸ AT 21.

⁹ *Baptismal Catechism*, 5.14.

¹⁰ See B. Bobrinskoy, "La Liturgie, expression de la foi," in *Communion du Saint-Esprit*, 193–203.

¹¹ See B. Bobrinskoy, "Onction baptismale et Trinité dans la tradition syrienne," in *Communion du Saint-Esprit*, 161–92.

¹² In Russia the catechumenate is performed during or before the *proskomedia*, and the celebrating priest pronounces the opening benediction, "Blessed is the Kingdom . . .," in front of the altar table.

The deacon chants the Great Litany of the liturgy of the catechumens in front of the baptismal font, and this is followed by the petitions of the baptismal ritual. The priest at this time says silently the prayer of the first antiphon, which is then sung by the choir. Then comes the great prayer for the blessing of the water. The second antiphon follows, with the hymn "Only Begotten Son," and this is followed by the blessing of oil and the pre-baptismal anointing. Then the Beatitudes are sung.

The priest enters the sanctuary and completes the Lesser Entrance. After the singing of the *troparia* there follows the baptismal immersion and clothing of the newly baptized in the white garment. Then come the prayer and unction of chrismation. The priest utters the *ekphonesis*, "For You are holy, O our God . . .," and the deacon, from the *ambon*, completes it with "and unto ages of ages."

Then follows the triple procession around the baptismal font, with the singing of "As many as have been baptized into Christ. . . ." This is followed by the *prokeimeon*, then the epistle and the gospel of baptism. After the supplication litany, the deacon adds the petitions of the baptismal litany. The litany of the catechumens is omitted.

Following the communion of the clergy, there comes the "churching" of the newly baptized and his or her communion. At the close of the service, after the dismissal, the priest reads the prayers of the eighth day and completes the ablutions and the tonsuring.

¹³ Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 169.

¹⁴ Ibid., 154.